

CASTELLAR ON SLAVERY.

The Debate in the Spanish Cortes on the Abolition of the "Peculiar Institution"—Senor Castellar's Great Speech in Behalf of Human Rights.

Transcription of the Spanish Cortes Constituent, on June 20, 1870, the discussion being upon the question of the abolition of slavery, Senor Castellar made a speech which created a profound impression throughout Europe, as noticed in our cable despatches at the time. He said:—

Senores Deputies:—Either I do not understand the law which is being discussed, or it proposes the gradual abolition of slavery. My amendment proposes immediate abolition. Those who formerly have supported slavery now support gradual abolition. As for us, we have always sustained the contrary, immediate abolition. I will now prove by reason, by historical records, by statistics, that my idea is the only one promising salvation, and that the idea of the committee and of the government has within it the germs of great and fearful catastrophes.

I desire to avoid a great calamity—the ruin of our national honor. If you would have nations prosper, shine, increase, think, and labor gloriously, infuse into them an idea of progress. All those who have obeyed great ideas have been elevated to riches and glory. Every nation which has obeyed false ideas has been ruined, and has lost its influence over the human conscience. I come, then, to ask that the Spanish nation shall elevate itself on the high plane of social principles, which are the secret of all prosperity and grandeur. We astonished the world at the beginning of the revolution of September.

We did so because upon waking up to modern life philosophical theories were disconcerted, as well as those of a social and political character, founded, as they all were, upon the supposition of our irremediable decadence.

For this reason our resurrection surprised the world. All hoped that we would give the first example of a transformation due to the intelligence and to the force of a people abandoned to itself. We ought to give the example not only to Europe, but likewise to America. We shall always be an American power. Historic deeds, however extraordinary they may have been, run back through many ages, and Spaniards cannot by their arms, nor can Americans by their ingratitudes, obliterate from memory the fact of the discovery of America, which is our work. America, notwithstanding her independence, an act logical and natural, will ever continue to be the delight of our spirit. And when the Americans (Spanish) shall seek, with a view to checking the greedy impulse of the Saxon race, to establish a great confederacy, made up of different confederacies, in order to invoke the fundamental unity of their origin, they will be compelled to recur to the language which we speak, and the blood which courses our veins. But more: To hitin this end it is necessary for us to hold in these American hands what is ours—a policy truly democratic.

The revolution of September was an auspicious moment for the initiation of this policy. Providence favored us. After many useless attempts, the submarine cable, giving a sort of spine to our planet, passed and transmitted from one continent to the other its respective ideas, its respective sentiments. How better could we have used this marvel of industry than by its metallic fibres to have transmitted in the sparks of the lightning itself the abolition of colonial regime for the whites and the abolition of the servile regime for the negroes? We did not do so; and some day or other we shall repent of it, however small and useless that may then be. And still it is said from the Conservative benches that we must await representatives from Cuba. I do not understand how this is demanded by those who have held our Antilla subject to exceptional rules. You submitted Cuba to a military despotism. Our kings, who were constitutional here, were over there absolutists; our ministers, who were responsible here, over there were arbitrary. You held the press under censure and its opinions under gag. You disposed of the rights of the people without hearing them, and of their tribunes without consulting them. The land of liberty stopped with the Canaries, and when the new Spanish world commenced, then began the dominion of absolutism which no people can endure without great political suffering. Never did you recognize the right of the colonies to be represented here, and when we asked that there should be received the most unfortunate of them all, you proclaimed our incompetency, and asked that the whites should come here to decide the fate of the negroes; that the masters should come to decide the lot of the slaves, and of the slaves, free without them and without us; free in spite of them and of us; free against them and against us; free by reason of their being children of God, by the sovereignty of nature, because of their being members of the human family. And every power which fails to recognize these primordial rights, whatever may be the law, or whatever convenience may dictate, commits assassination upon the human conscience, an assassination upon the soul—a crime which celestial rage punishes, and which damns itself with an everlasting infamy in the hell of history. (Applause.)

The question as to whether or not negroes are property shall not delay my argument. I have never believed such an absurdity. This law, judged by the light of my principles, cannot be approved. These emancipations, who live under a transmissible patron for many years, will be oppressed and driven about upon the faces of the old men and women, who will only become free when they shall become useless, remind me of those serfs whom the ancients consecrated to Esculapian, leaving them to die on an island in the Tiber. This law will emancipate the negroes in fifty years. Gradual epochs in the matter of abolition are horrible; they engender all the servile wars, the most bloody of all wars. It has been attempted a thousand times, and has always failed. The slave has a forest of his liberty, and struggles against his iron. The master knows that he is going to lose his slave, and so squeezes out the last drops of his sweat upon the field. When emancipation comes, that which is given up to freedom is a dead body. No; the interest of the master, who desires to preserve his property, and the rights of the slave who desires to be free, cannot be served at one and the same time. That is impossible.

The two difficulties in the way of the abolition of slavery are:—First, the dispute into which labor falls; and, second, the disproportion between the slave and free population.

In the English colonies this disproportion

was alarming. In them there was not a free laborer. This did not stop the English, for they abolished slavery. We ourselves have in our Antilles a much greater free than slave population. In Porto Rico there are 12,000 slaves and 350,000 free men. In Cuba there are 300,000 free men and 300,000 slaves. The negro race will be thankful for freedom, and, far from raising the banner of insurrection, it will cover you with benedictions. And what I say of the population I repeat as to labor. It is not possible that labor should fall into disrepute where there are so many free laborers. In Cuba 300,000 negroes are forced to labor by the side of 300,000 voluntary laborers. Were this not so, the public wealth would improve it. A statistician of Puerto Principe demonstrates that slavery has been in the descending and wealth has been in the ascending scale. For the year 1869 her mercantile transactions reached the amount of \$13,000,000, whereas years before they were not larger than \$7,000,000 per annum. The lesser fruits, which require but little labor or land, make up nine-tenths of the riches of the whole island. In reacting times, commissioners from Cuba and Porto Rico come here. The commissioners of Cuba asked for abolition in twelve years, but those from Porto Rico asked that it should be granted at once, with or without indemnity. These men deserved to be placed upon an equality with those who, in 1769, renounced their privileges and proclaimed the rights of all. Go with me over contemporary history, and you will find nowhere gradual abolition. It was in the second year of the French Republic. A negro, a slave, had come up from the bottom of his slave den to the Convention—a perception of the height of the human conscience. He asked liberty for his race, and the Assembly vacillated, as all those political organizations which pass the dividing lines of great social hemispheres. But many great orators spoke, and among them Danton, who was the thought and energy of the revolution. The Assembly, moved at last by great thoughts, voted unanimously the abolition of servitude. A cry of joy arose from all parts, as if the human race would palpitate with pleasure at freeing the conscience from such a gloomy weight of anxious thought. The negroes who were at the Convention entered the building, scattered along the benches, and, with tears in their eyes, embraced their redeemers. These tears shed by the liberated serfs were sufficient to efface from the human memory all the blood spilt by the convention in its delirium, and in the sottishness of its ideas.

To estimate properly gradual reforms, no race has a greater aptitude than the Saxon. In England seldom does one man initiate and achieve a reform. Some begin the work, others propagate the idea, and others put it in practice. Electoral reform, Catholic Emancipation, the common law—all this was effected gradually in England; but not so the abolition of slavery. The effort was made, but it required thirty years of Titanic labor to abolish the slave trade. In 1832 the project for immediate abolition was presented to and adopted by the two houses. England had spent \$400,000,000 to redeem her negroes. Never will the human conscience sufficiently thank her, nor will history applaud her as much as it ought.

But there is another example which shows how impossible is gradual abolition. This example serves as a veritable humanitarian and religious epopee. America had been born in order that it should be the Paradise of man free, of man regenerate; yet it was there that slavery budded. The evil was so great that it touched the United States of North America, and so intense was it that it profaned even the bosom of the republic. Not all of it, however, fell into the accursed den. Jefferson treaded the line where the black line of slavery should be broken. But the slave party had so grown that they were on the eve of passing that line. Then a navigator of the Mississippi and the Ohio, a Senator from the Great West, went up to the Capitol at Washington, and when the slave-owners gave utterance to their loudest defiance, he broke the chains of 3,000,000 of men; and that nothing might be wanting to his glory, not even martyrdom itself, he died, as did Socrates, as Christ, as all Redeemers, at the foot of his work, over which forever humanity will shed its tears and God His blessings. (Applause.)

I know that many in this chamber believe that such grand things are exclusively the property of the Saxon race; but our own, likewise, has performed them. Look at the examples of the American republics. Bolivia abolished slavery in 1826; Peru, Guatemala, Montevideo in 1828; Mexico in 1829; New Granada in 1849; Venezuela in 1853. The President of that republic, Monagas, began by supporting gradual abolition, but ended by declaring immediate abolition. The new French republic triumphed on the 24th of February, 1848. On the 7th of March it called together the commission charged with the abolition of slavery. The greater part of French mercantile cities protested, the owners of the slaves protested; but the reform was brought about with an energy and a grandeur of spirit which are so much to be admired as the poverty of our spirit is made plainer. During all the reign of Louis Philippe the owners were opposed to reform. They did not desire it under operation of law, but they found it under the revolution. They asked for preparation, and did not find it; for time, and could not get it; previous indemnity, but it was late coming; they demanded to receive \$300 each for their slaves, and had to content themselves with \$100. One day they arose doubting whether a slave was a human being, and before the sun had set saw him elevated to the dignity of a citizen. What glory for the French revolutionists of February! What shame for the Spanish revolutionists of September! The French colonies, emancipated, are free, rich, and happy.

It is said:—But how much richer is our island of Cuba! Ah! but what crimes follow in the wake of slavery! With this infamy existing there can be no justice. When the Regent of the Kingdom ceased to be Captain-General, the free negroes—not so much by that fact but by the law—were again reduced to servitude. What tribunals of justice! General Pezuela, during his short administration, captured 4000 contraband negroes landed from slave-ships. Lord Aberdeen said on a certain occasion that, notwithstanding 2000 negroes had been captured in a term of years, thousands had gone in the meantime upon the sugar estates. Lord Russell calculated the number of slaves as entered the island every year at a large figure. Rich and beautiful Cuba, thy plains are as a flower-garden; there is not within thy borders a poisonous reptile, and there float upon thy breezes choirs of birds which lift up an eternal symphony to the heavens, emanated as they are by a magic light. But if now there fall upon these plains torrents of blood, these torrents have been engendered by the evaporations of the drops which the lash of the white man has torn from the skin of the negroes. Thus, when I see on one and the other hand the

cruelty of this war—a cruelty which I equally condemn in both parties—I think we are paying the just expiation of our national wrong, the crimes engendered by slavery. The parties who make up this Chamber cannot repel my idea. The Conservative party represents stability, and a society cannot be stable when given over to the torments of a servile civil war, the irremediable consequence of a gradual abolition. The Progressive party, which never was abashed by kingly prestige, nor before the privileges of the slave-trader, cannot do so. The Democratic party derives its doctrine from the innate rights of man, and cannot make an exception against the negro in the universal application of rights. The Republicans unite the days of the republic to those most auspicious days when the slave shall be made free. Modern slavery is more horrible than ancient slavery. The old slavery had for its origin war, but modern slavery had for its origin the slave trade. Ancient slavery was founded in some metaphysical principle. Aristotle thought the family was a triangle, and on the sides were ranged parents, the children and the slaves. It is certain that many of these exercised duties in their natures noble, they exerted a powerful influence, and counted among them illustrious names. In modern slavery no Terence is to be found, no Epicurus. Modern slavery is brutal. Man in that condition is reduced to a mere labor machine. And yet it is said we thus speak because we own no slaves. We neither have them, nor do we desire to have them. We have been slaves; we have ourselves suffered. Plebeians in the persons of our ancestors have been bought and sold, and martyred or put to death under the vile yoke of slavery. Agree, Senores Deputies, to this, and be just. Agree to break the chains from the slaves, your brothers, and you will have put the cage to our age, which will be then the grandest of all if it shall prove to be the age of the final and definite redemption of all the slaves. I have said.

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